

THE PAST AND PRESENT OF PUBLIC ARCHAEOLOGY IN POLAND: BETWEEN EDUCATING AND ENGAGING LOCAL COMMUNITIES

El pasado y presente de la arqueología pública en Polonia:
Educar e involucrar a comunidades locales

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ABSTRACT This article briefly discusses the state of public archaeology in Poland. A short historical overview of the birth and recent development of the research is presented in the article, as well as two projects carried out by the authors that follow the directives of public archaeology. The article is concluded with the thesis that public archaeology will gain ground in Polish archaeology and is an increasingly relevant branch of archaeological research in the near future.

Keywords: Public Archaeology, Heritage, Society, Community, Poland.

RESUMEN Este artículo debate el estado de la arqueología pública en Polonia. Se presenta una breve historia del nacimiento y desarrollo de las investigaciones en la materia, para después destacar dos proyectos llevados a cabo por los autores que siguen las directrices de la arqueología pública. Se concluye con la idea de que la arqueología pública está ganando terreno en la arqueología polaca y se está colocando como una parte importante de la investigación arqueológica de cara al futuro cercano.

Palabras clave: Arqueología pública, Patrimonio, Sociedad, Comunidad, Polonia.

INTRODUCTION. THE PUBLIC AND ARCHAEOLOGY IN POLAND

The term *public archaeology* has been in use in archaeological discourse for almost five decades. It has quite different meanings for various scholars (e.g., McGimsey, 1972; Merriman, 2004; Holtorf, 2007; Matsuda and Okamura, 2011; Skeates *et al.*, 2012). For the purpose of this paper, we accept a broad understand-

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ding of this kind of archaeological practice. As recently pointed out by Lorna-Jane Richardson and Jaime Almansa-Sánchez (2015:194-195):

Public archaeology can be defined as both a disciplinary practice and a theoretical position, which can be exercised through the democratisation of archaeological communication, activity or administration, through communication with the public, involvement of the public or the preservation and administration of archaeological resources for public benefit by voluntary or statutory organisations. Broadly understood as a sub-discipline, public archaeology is as much an activity as a theoretical concept, and operates in a wide variety of societal, social and academic contexts.

From the above definition, it is clear that public archaeology is neither a new concept and approach. The idea of doing archaeology of social and cultural (as well as of political) value goes back to the beginning of the 20th century (Trigger, 1989; Biehl *et al.*, 2002), and within this peculiar sociohistorical context, the birth of public archaeology can be located.

Polish archaeology is no exception in this regard. For example, Józef Kostrzewski, the founder of Polish archaeology, is a tell-tale example. His research clearly shows the limitations of practising archaeology of social and cultural value in the past (see more in Rączkowski, 1996; Kobińska, 2014a). His archaeology embodies, so to speak, the public, social and political aspects of doing archaeology in the context of 20th century in Europe (Díaz-Andreu and Champion, 1996). It can be even said that archaeology was, at its most elementary level, a political practice. To put it simply, his archaeology was used to build up *grand narratives* about the glorious past of the nation. From an archaeological point of view, it is the *nation* that mattered more than society and, as a consequence, local communities. Such practice, with clear political (nationalist) aims is, to put it simply, outdated today.

Thanks to post-processual reflection, some important attempts have been made of late to conceive society as an active agent that can significantly contribute to archaeological research (see more in Holtorf, 2007; Matsuda and Okamura, 2011). Such archaeology works on a local level, and does not focus as much on national issues, at least not as much as before. It can be even said that archaeologists today would rather try to deliver *microhistories of local landscapes* than *grand narratives of the country* (but see Kokowski, 2007, 2011). This new approach presupposes that archaeology, on some level, serves local communities. Contemporary public archaeology is much more honest, democratic and, perhaps, *naïve*. As Holtorf (2007:157) has accurately pointed out:

...archaeology is a social practice providing services for people's own desires and demands. In a democratic state, academic disciplines must answer to people's needs, address their desires and concerns and be subjected to political control by non-scientists—even if citizens may occasionally decide against what the experts would deem to be in their best interest.

Similarly, a growing interest in public archaeology among Polish archaeologists is noticeable. The body of new books (e.g., Chowanec, 2010, 2012, 2017;

Marciniak *et al.*, 2011; Tabaczyński *et al.*, 2012; Zdziebłowski, 2014; Pawleta, 2016) and articles (e.g., Deskur, 2009; Marciniak, 2011; Pawleta, 2011a, 2011b; Kobiałka, 2013, 2014a, 2014b; Kajda *et al.*, 2015a, 2015b; Piślewska, 2015) that discuss the social and cultural values of archaeological research, best practices in promoting archaeology, and practical implications of archaeological research, has been growing systematically. Without any doubt, all these issues are fundamental to public archaeology (e.g., Merriman, 2004) (fig. 1).

The above examples and some other archaeological projects, e.g., *Misja Archeologiczna Chodlik* (*Chodlik. An Archaeological Mission*), *Laserowi Odkrywcy* (*Laser Discovers*, see Zapłata *et al.*, 2014) or *Przydrożne Lekcje Historii* (*Roadside History Lessons*) seem to confirm the fact that public archaeology in Poland has gained ground of late. Although such endeavours are of great importance, in Poland we still have to take into account that public archaeology is not just a means to an end; it is a way to deliver society a true and adequate face of archaeological research.

Recent discussions within the field have pointed out that public archaeology does not simply transfer the results of archaeological research to non-archaeologists



Fig. 1.—Archaeology at the local community level - firsthand experience of archaeological heritage (author K. Kajda).

(Holtorf, 2007) more accurately, nor can society be considered and treated as a passive addressee of archaeological knowledge. Instead, it considers society as an active partner of archaeological practice which expresses its ideas about the past and its research (fig. 2).

Another important aspect that is also worth highlighting when thinking about public archaeology is the fact that the epistemological dimension of archaeological research does not have to be always the most important aspect when conducting projects. This is actually the case of two projects carried out by the authors (Kajda *et al.*, 2015a, 2015b; Kajda and Kostyrko, 2016), which will be described in further detail below.

In short, the aims of public archaeology, as we understand it, is not so much about teaching people about the past of their ancestors. Rather, it is more about treating local communities and various stakeholders as partners in dialogue about the past and its value in the present. Accordingly, it is the meaning of the past in the present that concerns archaeologists and people interested in it. By the same



Fig. 2.—Badania archeologiczne. Zakaz wejścia (Archaeological excavation. No entry). This is still a very common aspect of conducting archaeological excavations in Poland today (author M. Kostyrko).

token, this is the politics of public archaeology we try to practise. We claim that each archaeological project has to be, up to a point, inclusive, participatory, and local-community oriented. Without people, there is neither public archaeology, nor archaeology as such. And this is the contemporary politics of public archaeology. Instead of delivering grand narratives of the nation, we as archaeologists should be more focused on building bridges with local communities. Even small-scale archaeological projects have their own unquestionable value. We are especially interested in developing and promoting such comprehension of public archaeology in Poland.

In what follows, we shortly discuss our two projects, which are examples of putting into practice the directives of public archaeology outlined above. The first case study is about how remote sensing technologies can be used as a way of engaging local communities in discovering the landscapes they inhabit. The second project presents public archaeology as an inclusive practice. It concerns the ways people with intellectual disabilities conceptualise the past and heritage, and what these concepts might mean to them, as well as how archaeologists can better engage with students with disabilities. We conclude with a thesis that public archaeology will gain ground in Polish archaeology, and become an increasingly relevant branch of archaeological practice and research.

CASE STUDY. APPLIED ARCHAEOLOGY. SOCIETY-PAST-REMOTE SENSING

The first case study focuses on a project carried out in 2012. The project was the result of cooperation between the Institute of Archaeology at the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, as part of the ArcLand project, and the Association for the Villages' Development (Razem) from Bieniów. It was a society-driven, community archaeology project which linked archaeologists with history enthusiasts and children.

The main advantage of the project came from the fact that it was inspired by the public itself. The idea of such endeavour was proposed by Razem and the residents of Bieniów. Regionalists asked Kornelia Kajda and Mikołaj Kostyrko from the Institute of Archaeology whether it would be possible to study the archaeological site, a medieval hill fort (Biedrzychowice Dolne no. 5) located on the border of two villages, Bieniów and Biedrzychowice Dolne, in the southwest of Lubuskie province. Because it was social initiative we were very happy to respond positively to them.

When we started to prepare to the project, we were highly inspired by Greenberg's (2009: 46) postulates considering the questions which archaeologists should ask themselves before starting their research. These are:

- *Who are our clients, in the broadest sense?*
- *What kind of impact are we making on the place which we have chosen to excavate?*
- *Have local people been involved in the decisions that will affect their environment?*

- *What is being done to enhance the positive effects of our work?*
- *What is being done to mitigate negative effects of our work?*
- *What is our legacy to the site and its surroundings, after we have left it?*

Following these questions, we spearheaded a project titled *Applied Archaeology. Society-Past-Remote Sensing*, which fulfilled assumptions of public and community archaeology, and asked the questions listed above. First of all, we tried to define our ‘clients,’ to use Greenberg’s term, and spend some time in the village to get to know the local community and their ideas about local heritage. This move was very instructive, because it allowed us to plan our project taking into account the social context as well as possible impact of our undertaking on the community. To enhance the positive effect of our work, we decided that at the beginning, the main goal of project would focus on opening up of archaeology to society, listening intently to peoples’ ideas and opinions, and indicating possible ways of cooperation. Because the local community had a relatively negative view of archaeological excavations—seeing them as expensive and time-consuming—we decided that the project would be carried out using non-invasive methods, which would show that archaeology has different faces and uses various research methods, and not just excavations.

Therefore, the project’s main aim was to promote non-invasive archaeology in the community and to develop awareness of the importance of archaeological heritage (see more in Kajda and Kostyrko, 2016). Due to the broad goals of the project, it was a three-stage endeavour. The first consisted of various surveys conducted before commencing research at the archaeological site. Before our field research, we sent 150 questionnaires to the inhabitants of the villages near our research area. We received and analysed 54 complete questionnaires before starting our investigation. Thanks to the analysis of our questionnaires, we had information about the attitudes of the local community towards archaeology, archaeologists and heritage, which enabled us to evaluate our own methods for the promotion of archaeology. During this first stage of the project, we also prepared a meeting with the members of Razem and archival searches. The first questionnaires showed that the local community wants and expects archaeologists to share their knowledge, and familiarise society with their research methods and results of the studies conducted in the region of their inhabitancy.

Taking into account these responses, during the second stage (which comprised non-invasive research at the site) of the project, we conducted archaeological field lessons for the pupils of the primary and secondary school in Bieniów. During the field walking survey and workshops, we introduced them to the landscape of the heritage site, the work of archaeologists, and our research methods. We also showed them how to operate the equipment (total station and GPS RTK – children themselves determined and collected the points) used during the non-invasive research (fig. 3). Because the site was located at the outskirts of the village, however, many people were not informed about our works, therefore we encouraged students to go the village, talk to the people about their research and invite them to our site. Thanks to this, we also entered into contact with village inhabitants, who sometimes came



Fig. 3.—Children from the local school during the workshops on the site (author K. Kajda).

to the site and asked us questions about our work and its possible results. We also encouraged them to a little bit longer bit longer and take part in a common dinner that was prepared by locals from “Razem” Association. Working and eating together helped us to present archaeology from our perspective, i.e., as a science that is developing its methods and a discipline, the results of which may influence perceptions of the local landscape.

Additionally, living and walking to the village with the local community was also a great opportunity for us to carry out anthropological and sociological surveys, in the form of interviews and anonymous questionnaires, which would show us how the perception of archaeology, heritage and landscape changes in society when archaeologists from the very beginning of their projects engage with locals, and encourage them to get to know their history.

During the field study, we conducted additional 20 interviews with members of the local community, which gave us more information about the social role of archaeology. Local people were asked about their knowledge of the region’s history, their interest in it, their knowledge of nearby historical and prehistoric monuments, and their frequency with which they visited them. We also wanted to know how they perceived archaeology and archaeologists, and what they associated archaeology with.

With regard to the last point, many people noticed that an archaeologist is a person who deals with the past, which is studied through excavations. Although we tried to change this one-sided association of archaeology with excavations, this was not successful, as evidenced with only a handful of respondents mentioning in their questionnaires that archaeology also uses other means of study. Additionally, despite the widespread belief that cinema created the image of an archaeologist, it is not Lara Croft and Indiana Jones who the respondents associated with the profession (Holtorf, 2005:34). Rather, it is the research method which archaeology uses, namely excavations.

The project did not terminate with the completion of fieldwork. It was essential for us not to leave our 'clients', as it were, with an impression of being used for study. From the beginning, it was clear to us that involving the community in archaeology must continue after our work is complete, and that the community deserves more attention. In this light, we organised a conference in Bieniów directed at the local community, and promoted the results of our study around region and the country. We invited local historians and archaeologists who talked about the past of the region, and the importance of regional heritage. We also asked the local administration to participate in the conference, because we wanted them to realise the potential of local heritage in promoting the region, as well as its role in the sustainable development. The conference turned out to be eventful for the local community, and witnessed about 100 people who wanted to get to know more about the regional history, and who expressed their concerns about the future of heritage preservation, and possibilities of cooperation with researchers and the local administration (figs. 4 y 5).



Fig. 4.—Conference in Bieniów during which archaeologists presented results of their projects related to the region (author K. Kajda).

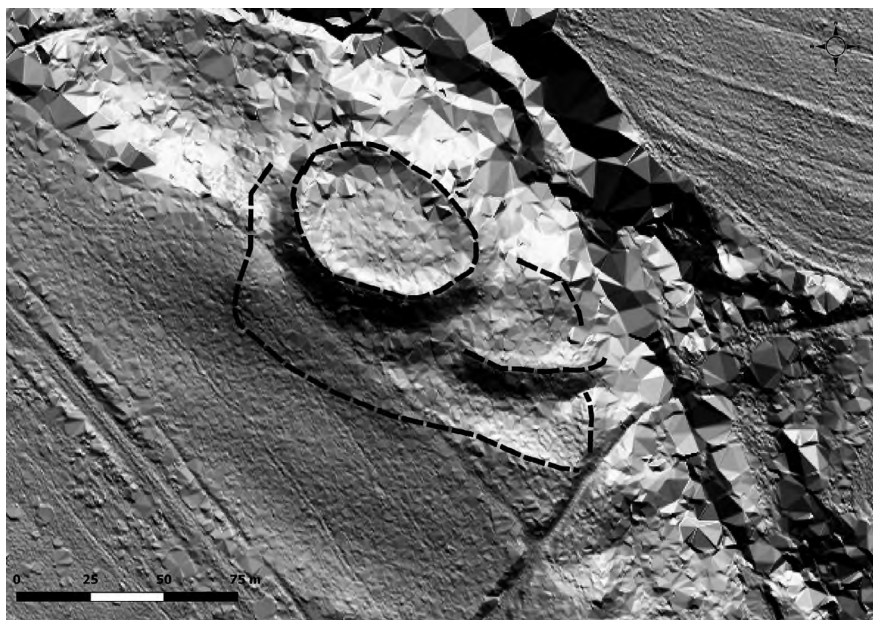


Fig. 5.—One of the results of the field research: a visualisation of Biedzychowice Dolne no. 5 based on LiDAR derivatives (author M. Kostyrko).

Today, the site which we worked on is well-known among the local community, with the state forestry department and Razem erecting an signboard detailing the results of our project, and containing information for tourists about the historical significance of the site. The medieval hillfort became also a popular site for educational visits by local schools, where students can experience the past in a tangible way.

CASE STUDY. HERITAGE FOR ALL. PERCEPTION OF THE PAST AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL HERITAGE BY PEOPLE WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES

In 2014, in cooperation with the Institute of Archaeology of Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, the School of Special Education in Żary, and Tomasz Michalik, we carried out a small project entitled *Archeologia dla wszystkich. Postrzeganie dziedzictwa archeologicznego przez osoby z niepełnosprawnością umysłową (Heritage for all. Perception of the Past and Archaeological Heritage by People with Intellectual Disabilities)*. The goals, methodology and preliminary results have already been published, both in English (Kajda *et al.*, 2015a) and Polish (Kajda *et al.*, 2015b). Here, we shortly summarise the most important aspects of the project.

Taking into account public and inclusive archaeological interest in the social and cultural value of heritage (Greenberg, 2009; Philips and Gilchrist, 2012; McDavid

and Brock, 2015), we were eager to investigate how people from different social and cultural milieus understand archaeological heritage, the day-to-day practice of archaeology, and its meaning in the contemporary world. Our case study was a group of 14 young students from the school in Żary. While organising and carrying out the project, we cooperated with specialists, namely educators and a psychologist. One of the main reasons for choosing students with intellectual disabilities was the fact this group is excluded from many social and cultural activities (Rix and Lowe, 2010; Stefańska, 2011). It was presupposed that if archaeology is a social and cultural practice, then it can contribute to providing value to different groups of people, including students with intellectual disabilities (fig. 6).

The project was a two-step approach. The first consisted of psychological research pertaining to the understanding of the concept of the past by people with intellectual disabilities. During this part of the project, we asked our participants to explain what they associated with the past, verbally and through drawings (fig. 7). We also examined how they perceived time, and their ability to make sense of the past on the basis of various types of evidence. The second step involved an excur-



Fig. 6.—Practising public archaeology. Embodying the experience of heritage is more important than the epistemological value of archaeological research (author K. Kajda).

sion to the early medieval hillfort in Bieniów and the local museum. This part was intended to inform us whether such places and visits have potential influence on the understanding of the past among those with intellectual disabilities.

Bearing in mind the very limited number of students who participated in the study, the data obtained offers just a glimpse into a few issues regarding students with intellectual disabilities and their perception and value of heritage. Among them were: the way traces of the past are understood by people with intellectual disabilities; the understanding of the past by individuals with intellectual disabilities; what it means when it is said that something happened a long time ago; the value of archaeological sites for students with intellectual disabilities; and the difference between the past and history among students (see more in Kajda *et al.*, 2015a).

According to Holtorf (2010:191), contemporary value of archaeology relies on delivering metastories (metahistory) related to humanity. For our students, however, archaeology as a science that reconstructs metastories did not matter. This raises an important issue regarding archaeological museums as well: how to effectively and interestingly present archaeological materials to certain groups, such as students with intellectual disabilities? One thing was certain, the typical archaeological exhibition did not work in this context. A stone axe exhibited behind glass is not *heritage* at all, at least not to the group of students who participated in this project.



Fig. 7.—The first part of the project, ‘Tell me what you see, what’s going on in this picture?’.

Although we wanted to get insight into how a group of 14 young students with learning and cognitive problems perceived and narrated the past, at the end of the project, we who learned something from the participants. Initially, it seemed that the people interviewed and observed during the study could not understand the meaning of history as consisting of, put simply, past events and people. For example, a Neolithic pot sherd is heritage for the archaeologist; but for our participants, this was not so obvious. But we learned something no less important —that the historical or archaeological dimension is the experience of the present.

The participants experienced history or the past in this way. As one of our participants stated, “I drew my house. I associate it with the past.” For the students, heritage is part of their lives; it could consist of anything associated with their day-to-day experiences. Heritage does not simply mean something that holds a historical value. As a consequence, our students had a completely different comprehension of something happening a long time ago. For most of our participants, ‘a long time ago’ means a week or two months ago, vastly different, of course, from the timescale used by archaeologists. We had to bear this in mind while organising events for these students.

For our students, the most important and enjoyable part of the project was the visit to the Middle Age hillfort, as well as an excursion to Chatka Henia, where we organised an archery contest for them. The locations, the artefacts (replicas of archaeological artefacts we prepared to show the students, which they could touch), the practices (the archery contest) were all relevant to the students when they became firsthand experience, so to speak. Through personal experience, the places, the practices, and the artefacts became part of their lives, and, as a consequence, their *heritage*. As mentioned previously, the epistemological aspects of an archaeological project do not necessarily have to be the most important aims of public archaeology; it is also about personal experience and contact with the material past.

This point might have important implications apropos of including people with intellectual disabilities in an archaeology with social and cultural value in the present. It seems that the most effective context in which to engage people with intellectual disabilities in practicing archaeology is an open-air museum. At such a museum, one can organise a series of activities that enable people to touch, smell, and experience the materiality of artefacts. No less important is the point that an archaeologist can arrange activities that refer to individual experiences and everyday life, which are not abstract ideas and representations of events/people that existed in a woolly past.

Such archaeological projects aimed at including students with intellectual disabilities in archaeology have to face an interesting challenge. If, as our case study indicates, heritage is understood as referring only to our students’ lives (e.g., “I drew my house. I associate it with the past”), then the most banal artefacts, like a bicycle used by one of the students, should be conceived as *heritage* too. Indeed, at the most elementary level, it is as much material heritage as a Neolithic pot sherd.

Heritage for all was a small project. However, it raised many questions and provided some interesting preliminary answers regarding cooperation with different social and cultural groups. It opened up our eyes to a completely different

understanding of the past, history, heritage and their values. It was a challenging experience for us, and will definitely not be our last attempt at doing archaeology of social and cultural value for students with intellectual disabilities. Because we discovered that these students are very able, they simply understand and experience the world in a slightly different way.

CONCLUSION

For most of the 20th century, archaeological research was frequently used for political reasons and being a tool for shaping the *nation*. However, there have been recent attempts at offering a more inclusive, participatory, and local community-oriented archaeological projects. It can even be said that in this case, archaeologists try to deliver here microhistories of the local landscapes rather than grand narratives of the country. Put otherwise, more and more archaeologists presuppose that public archaeology is *an end in itself*. Once again, this concerns the way archaeology is today practised in many European countries.

Indeed, the main thesis of this paper is that archaeology is, at its most elementary level, a kind of social and cultural practice. There is no archaeology without the public. In short, each archaeological research is always, up to a point, an example of public archaeology. The whole issue is to be aware and reflexive *about* and *in* these relations. In our opinion, this makes public archaeology one of the most important branches of contemporary archaeologies.

Both projects presented in this article attempted to deliver stories and experiences that would be of value for local communities. Such projects, will doubtless not bring about any change to the dominant discourse, being only trials to offer archaeology ‘with a human face,’ or archaeology for the people. Nonetheless, one can carefully forecast that there is hope that public archaeology in Poland has a chance to be a small but relevant part of archaeological discourse, as it is nowadays in the British Isles or Scandinavia. New projects, books, and articles that touch upon public archaeology in Poland are a good sign in that matter (e.g., Pawleta, 2016; Chowaniec, 2017).

All in all, the relation between public archaeology and the present is another crucial aspect of this kind of research—it clearly shows and puts into practice an idea that archaeology is more about the present than the past. This is a cliché in some archaeological milieus today; but it remains one worth repeating and bearing in mind when organising archaeological projects and field research. The past is for the present, never the other way around. In short, this is the politics of contemporary archaeology, the politics of public archaeology.

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